



THE ASTOR LIBRARY.



HIS institution was founded by John Jacob Astor, who died in New York in 1848, leaving a legacy of \$400,000 "for the establishment of a public library in the city of New York." From this bequest was erected what is known as the "south building" of the present structure, on the east side of Lafayette Place, between Fourth and Eighth Streets.

This building is 65 feet wide, 105 feet deep, and 70 feet high. Its main hall is used as a reading-room, and was first opened to the public on January 9, 1854. Two years later, Mr. William B. Astor, eldest son of the founder, donated to the Astor Library a piece of land adjoining this building, and erected thereon the present "north building" of the library, which we illustrate, and which is of the same dimensions as the other. These two buildings have a capacity of 200,000 volumes, and at present contain about three-fourths of that number.

In addition to his donation already mentioned, the late Mr. William B. Astor presented considerable sums of money to the library at different times, his latest gift while living being made in 1866, and amounting to \$50,000. The entire sum which, during his life, he added to his father's munificent bequest, amounted to about \$250,000, to which a codicil of his will adds the sum of \$200,000.

John Jacob Astor was born at Waldorf, near Heidelberg, July 17, 1763. He was the youngest of four sons of a farmer, and his boyhood was passed on his father's farm. In 1769, he followed one of his brothers to London, where he remained in the latter's service, in the business of a musical instrument maker, until 1783, when, with a stock of musical instruments, amounting in value to a few hundred dollars, he sailed for America, designing to speculate in the business with which he was best acquainted.

Meeting on the voyage, however, a furrier, with whom he formed an acquaintance, and from whom he learned much concerning the fur trade, which inclined him to consider it worth favor, Mr. Astor exchanged his stock in New York for furs, and began to devote himself to disposing of these, with a view to building up a business of his own.

So successful was he in his new occupation that, in a very few years, he owned several ships, by means of which he established a prosperous European trade—sending his furs abroad, and receiving in return the products and manufactures of foreign countries.

In the beginning of the present century Mr. Astor was worth about \$200,000. He now began to devise grand schemes of profit, and, with a view to their execution, established a trading port at Astoria, near the mouth of the Columbia River, whence he purposed supplying the civilized world with furs. His well-formed plans failed, from a variety of antagonistic circumstances, and he made only losses. The history of this enterprise will be found written at length in Washington Irving's "Astoria."

Mr. Astor now turned his attention to the purchase of

real-estate in the city of New York, having early divined the vast future progress of the metropolis, and the certainty of its real-estate becoming greatly advanced in value. In fact, the rapid growth of the city was commensurate with his anticipations, and his wealth became fostered and increased by this means alone, until, at his death, in 1849, Mr. Astor was estimated to possess a fortune of about \$30,000,000.

In the meantime, an elder brother—Mr. Henry Astor—had come to New York, engaged in the business of a butcher, become wealthy, followed his brother's example by purchasing large tracts of land, chiefly on the east side of the city, and, at his death, had bequeathed his property to his nephew, Mr. William B. Astor, who, at the time he inherited the bulk of his father's wealth, was estimated to be worth \$6,000,000 in his own right.

The latter gentleman—and whose death, on the 26th of November, produced a marked impression throughout the country, as well as in the locality where he lived and died—was born in September, 1792, and was 56 years of age when he inherited his father's property.

Already a millionaire, Mr. Astor also inherited and encouraged those habits of care and judgment in managing a large financial interest, whose practice by his father had preserved for him the interest to manage.

Devoting himself to his life-long task with that degree of labor and assiduity which alone could result in success, Mr. Astor, nevertheless, permitted none of the projects which his father had at heart to languish, but found time amid his multiplied business engagements to extend a fostering care over each of them.

And thus the "Astor Library," in New York, and the "Astor House," Waldorf—the latter a benevolent institution founded by John Jacob Astor, in a codicil to his will—were firmly established on the foundation laid by their original benefactor; while, particularly in the case of the former establishment, and thanks to his fine intellectual perception, æsthetic tastes, and a liberal education, the world has reason to be grateful to the son, in as full a degree as to the father, for liberal and judicious expenditure in its behalf. Established and sustained through the wise generosity of these two members of the Astor family, the library which bears their name is at once an honor to their memory and the intellectual position of the country.

Much of its usefulness is, of course, owing to the judicious and experienced intelligence of the late Dr. Joseph G. Cogswell, the learned bibliographer whom the elder Astor selected with wise foresight to dispose of his munificent legacy with the best practical wisdom looking towards its future benefit to the city it was designed to do much towards educating and refining. Dr. Cogswell was for many years Superintendent of the Library, and in that capacity organized its system of classification, purchased the bulk of its contents, and completed his arduous labors by compiling the catalogue of the institution. Having done all of this, he retired from his directorship, and presently laid him down to die in his home at Cambridge, Massachusetts, followed by the affectionate and respectful mourning of all who knew him—all of whom loved and admired him.

Following Dr. Cogswell, the superintendence of the library fell in the hands of Mr. Francis Schroeder, formerly, and for many years, United States Minister to Stockholm. On his retirement, Dr. E. R. Straznicky, the first assistant librarian, was advanced to the position, and still holds it. Dr. Straznicky was for many years Secretary of the American Geographical Society, and is a gentleman of large acquirements, and particularly a distinguished linguist. He is assisted chiefly by Mr. Frederick Saunders, the well-known and graceful Essayist, and by Mr. Arthur W. Tyler, a young, but highly-considered authority in theological literature.

The Astor Library contains in the neighborhood of 150,000



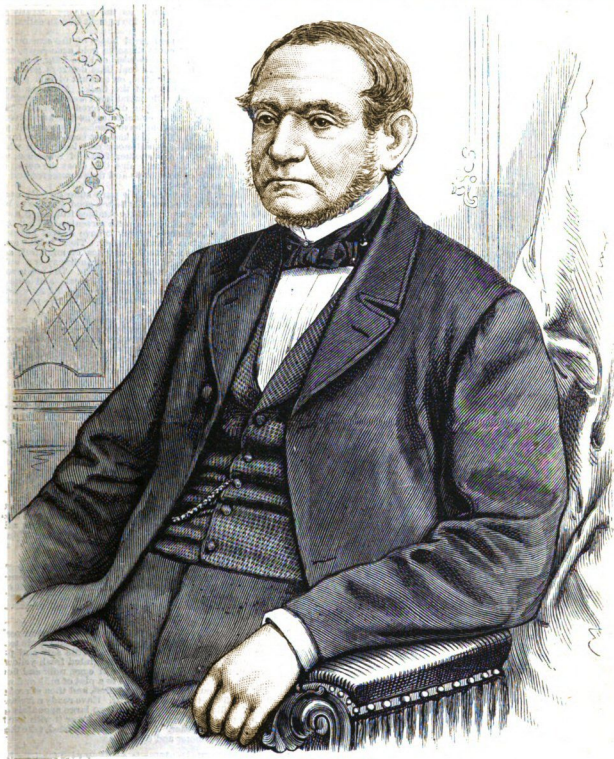
THE NORTH ROOM, ASTOR LIBRARY, LAFAYETTE PLACE, NEW YORK.

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volumes, and is divided by its two buildings into two grand classes—Literature in the north and Science in the south building. The minor classification of both these grand divisions is after the system of the French bibliographer, Brunet, and is at once minute and comprehensive.

As a working-library, for students or authors, the Astor is,

study. In fact, many of these readers are themselves a study, and very much can be learned concerning human nature, by considering carefully, and at length, the characteristics, habits, and topics of thought, of the hundreds, male and female, who daily spend hours in poring over novel or recondite literature in the reading-halls of the



THE LATE WILLIAM B. ASTOR.

perhaps, unequalled by any other of its size in the world. It is sufficient to state on this point that the "History of Civilization," projected by Henry Thomas Buckle, could have been written in its alcoves.

Being a reference-library, the Astor is chiefly useful through the aids it furnishes to writers and instructors. Yet it is filled daily with readers for pleasure as well as for

great and beneficent institution which owes its existence and its usefulness to the princely Astors.